

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN



### Articulating Relations: A Non-Representational View of Scandinavian Rock Art

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A popular cliché when it comes to the interpretation of images is that meaning lies in the eye of the beholder, suggesting that meaning is, if not individual, at least culture specific. This echoes a traditional approach in the history of art according to which the meaning of an image is only understandable through context—that is, through its secondary or conventional meaning (e.g., Panofsky 1972, 4). Archaeological studies of imagery have generally addressed meaningful content and tried to understand what they depict, represent, illustrate, or symbolize (Aldhouse-Green 2004). There is little discussion of what images can do, or how they may affect future understandings of a place or artifact that has been “adorned” with them. Images of past worlds are, however, always tricky to handle because they seem to “talk back” to us in a fairly direct tone—sometimes even surpassing the rhetorical power of written text. They are not simply depicting something, but also communicating with the observer in elaborate and unconscious ways. This aesthetic property—or agency, if you like—is an underdeveloped field in studies of prehistoric imagery (Cochrane & Russell 2007). However, as Thomas Mitchell (1996) and Alfred Gell (1992) among others have argued, the study of the pictorial need not be primarily concerned with decoding the meaning of an image or exploring the intentions behind it. To bypass the problems of being led astray by aesthetics and apparently figurative aspects, we may approach imagery as “objects of encounter” rather than as “objects of recognition” (O’Sullivan 2005, 1). An object of recognition is merely a representation of something always already in place; but

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as an object of encounter it “produces a cut, a crack” that obliges us to think otherwise about what we see (*ibid.*).

Mats Rosengren’s (2012) discussion of Paleolithic cave art is a good illustration of this distinction. As a professor of rhetoric, he found it curious that archaeologists have primarily been occupied with the origins and the background of the paintings—that is, what animals the paintings depict, how naturalistic and accurately they are portrayed, and how representative the paintings are of “their worlds.” There has been much less discussion of what the practice of making images can tell us about the people crafting them. Why were they made, and what did it do to the people who saw them? How do they change the experience of the caves? To “encounter” past imagery, however, does not simply mean that we should approach them with “an open mind” or be more reflective about what we see. On the contrary, such a non-representational approach suggests that images can be perceived as integrated actants with a potential to affect the worlds that produced them. The images and shapes that surround us are not simply something that reflects past worlds; they are also to varying extents integrated in the course of events. Producing imagery affects things, whether in the form of paintings on a cave wall, pecked motifs on the bedrock, or punched elements on an artifact.

In this chapter I will attempt to discuss south Scandinavian petroglyphs as “material articulations.” This means to emphasize the relationships that they help to integrate and to focus on their material conditions, their production process (in its technical and multi-sensuous aspects), and on how new and old motifs relate to each other, the rock face, and the local environment. In a similar way as Rosengren approaches Paleolithic cave art and Mitchell approaches modern day pictures, I will discuss the petroglyphs as objects of encounter and elaborate on the various ways they may be entangled in different social worlds.

## **MATERIAL IMAGES, MATERIAL RELATIONS**

Petroglyphs have been carved and pecked on exposed rock faces in Scandinavia more or less continuously from c. 8000 BC to the present day (Vogt 2006). In Scandinavian rock art research, a distinction is generally made between a northern hunter-gatherer tradition and a southern tradition emerging at the beginning of the Bronze Age (c. 1700–500 BC). The south Scandinavian petroglyphs have traditionally been interpreted as a cultural expression of Bronze Age ideology, religion, or cosmology (e.g., Kristiansen 1990; Kaul 1998; Bradley 2009, 125). Besides general questions of chronology, the petroglyphs have thus been discussed primarily in terms of what they represent, mean, or symbolize

(Goldhahn 2008a). In recent research the focus has shifted somewhat from the petroglyph's pictorial content to also include the context in terms of regional niches, places, and the micro-topography of the rock (e.g., Tilley 2004; Ling 2008; Coles 2011). However, also in these studies the motifs are understood as images of real or ideal objects (boats, the sun, foot soles, etc.). In order to approach the petroglyphs as objects of encounter, an alternative approach is to downplay the figurative content and to focus more on how aspects of production and appropriation are related to place and materiality. From such a perspective, petroglyphs can be considered as material articulations that do not simply represent or reflect a social backdrop, but also play an active role in social formation and change.

In one sense it may seem strange to discuss petroglyphs as material articulations, since in a strict sense they constitute a void or inverted materiality. This property of being based on removal rather than composition of matter is far from uninteresting. It is a point I will return to. It is quite evident that the "canvas," the rock face itself and its material properties, is important for understanding what petroglyphs "want." In Gibsonian terms the bedrock offers several properties that may or may not have been viewed as significant when making the images. Immutability is one obvious aspect of the rock, which ties the imagery to a certain place in space (and probably also to a certain landscape niche). The resilient aspect of the rock is another affordance of central importance. It provides a long-lasting, perhaps even eternal, life to the images. There are examples of petroglyphs that seem to have been deliberately destroyed and others that have been covered up, intentionally or not, with rocks and soil (e.g., Goldhahn 2008b, 47; Nilsson 2012), but the fact that thousands of images pecked in rock survived into the present says a great deal. Another aspect of these resilient properties may be that it took time and effort to make petroglyphs. The typical smooth surfaces and formations created during the Ice Age are also important aspects of the rock surface, which may have been employed to relate the images and connect them to other places and locales. For example, in his analysis of the Simris petroglyphs in the southernmost of Sweden, Tilley (2004, 214) suggests that the ripples in the surface caused during the Ice Age may represent metaphorical waves of a "frozen sea." Others have discussed the audible properties of the rock as an important aspect in the process of making of the images (e.g., Nordström 1999; Whitley 2011, 156), as well as other aesthetic aspects like the feel or touch of the rock (Heyd & Clegg 2003; Tilley 2008, 201).

The material properties of the rock may play a different role in the renaissance of making petroglyphs during the Early Bronze Age in southern Scandinavia—perhaps even inviting and encouraging it due

to the rock's special affordances. These material properties certainly also affect the way images were appropriated over time. It is of course difficult to wholly bypass issues of representation when discussing images like petroglyphs; the issue of representation is, however, far from unproblematic and can work in different ways. Mitchell (1994, 419–20) argues that the relation between original and representation may not be straightforward, but rather resemble an activity or process. Instead of viewing representation as a homogeneous field of relations governed by a single principle, representation may be viewed as “a heterogeneous terrain, a collage or patchwork quilt assembled over time out of fragments” (ibid.).

The idea that an image, thing, or practice can be entangled in a multitude of relationships is perhaps most frequently discussed within various strands of Actor-Network Theory (Law 1999, 3–5). Such relational and non-representational perspectives favor relational connections before categorical thinking. This view has also been explored in anthropology (Henare et al. 2007), geography (Anderson & Harrison 2010), and archaeology (e.g., Pollard 2005; Jones 2006; Ojala 2009). Being a relatively new approach, it offers by no means a coherent method or consistent theoretical framework. In a sense it can be characterized as a radicalization of social constructionism that attempts to view the social in terms of a “meshwork” of humans *and* things, real *or* ideal aspects (Ingold 2007, 80–84). Bruno Latour illustrates this point in his discussion of the hyphen between the terms “actor” and “network” in Actor-Network Theory. The main thing, he argues, is not really about actors, networks, or theory, but rather about what lies behind the hyphen between the terms (Latour 1999). The hyphen is a silent signifier of what lies between, the “dark matters” of fluid networks of relations. In a similar vein, this text will not focus on the “rock” or the “art,” but on the “dark matter” between the material and the figurative (Latour 2005, 177). Although the medium, the rock, and the figurative content, the art, are certainly important, it is the space between the material and the imagery that really matters.

Having said this, it is important to point out that non-representational perspectives need not be anti-representational per se. Rather, as Anderson and Harrison (2010, 19) put it: “What pass for representations are apprehended as performative presentations, not reflections of some *a priori* order waiting to be unveiled, decoded, or revealed.” Emphasizing the ways images are entangled in different sets of relations instead of defining meaning from context allow us to bypass much of the kind of binary thinking that has plagued rock-art research (e.g., real/imaginary, mobile/sedentary, Bronze Age/Neolithic, material/immaterial, general/particular, local/global, death/fertility, ritual/social, etc). A relational

perspective allows for many simultaneous sets of relations, in which petroglyphs need not primarily represent something ideal or real but may in fact depend on varying circumstances (see Henare et al. 2007, 8).

## **BETWEEN THE REAL AND THE MAGICAL: ANIMATED IMAGERY**

Throughout the history of research on them, south Scandinavian petroglyphs have been related to a varying extent to real and social circumstances. Mats Malmer suggested that they represent offerings to the gods and that petroglyphs were made as substitutes for real objects in metal (Malmer 1989, 27). Recently, Courtney Nimura (2012) has suggested that the southern tradition of mainly coast-bound petroglyphs coincides with the general land rise, and that the practice was evoked by the stress caused by the declining waters; the production of images was thus intensified during the Bronze Age, presumably in order to stop the water level from going down. Johan Ling (2008) connects the same production of images with the increasing importance of bronze, and suggests that especially the boat figure in particular is related to the import of metal to southern Scandinavia (see Ballard et al. 2003). Magical thinking may indeed be employed to evoke response from both man and nature. However, besides Malmer, very few actually argue why petroglyphs were used for such purposes instead of other means and practices. For instance, we could draw an analogy with the modern-day cargo cult of certain islands of the Pacific Ocean, whereby symbolic landing strips complete with airplanes and control towers were constructed to evoke the return of the flying colonialists (Lindstrom 1993). A landing strip, albeit fake, surely makes more sense in evoking a return than repeatedly hammering out petroglyphs on the bedrock.

A most important but often neglected aspect is that the practice of making petroglyphs has been used by the circumpolar hunter-gatherers for many millennia before it appeared in southern Scandinavia during the Early Bronze Age. At several localities, such as Alta, Kanozero, Nämforsen, and Vyg, the two traditions coincide and overlap (Gjerde 2010, 346, 381, 386; see Vogt 2006, 225), but few attempts have been made to relate them in ways other than stylistically and typologically (but see for example Sognnes 2001, 124). It would, however, seem logical that the “innovation” of a southern tradition would be related, at least in some ways, to the older (but contemporary) northern one. There are indeed a number of differences between the two, but they also have more in common than meets the eye (see Nordbladh 1980, 16; Vogt 2006, 226; Bradley 2009, 140–1; 2010, 197). The point here is that a sharp distinction between them is difficult to maintain, especially since

the dating methods for petroglyphs are rather crude (e.g., Sognnes 2001, 36–38; Fahlander 2012a, 105). Instead of interpreting the petroglyphs as coming from either a Stone Age or a Bronze Age context, a non-representational approach may succeed in opening up a space in which the two traditions are allowed to intersect.

An alternative scenario could thus be that images were made in certain areas in order to relate to something or someone to whom they made sense. The Bronze Age petroglyphs have been traditionally associated with continental or even Mediterranean worlds (Kristiansen 1990; Malmer 1999; Kristiansen & Larsson 2005), but in this particular case it is perhaps more likely that they were directed to the northern hunters—after all it is “their” traditions of making petroglyphs that experience a renaissance in southern Scandinavia during this period. The newfound interest in making petroglyphs may thus have originally been a case of archaization—a way to establish connections to a semimythical past or to create a relation with others by appropriating “their” modes of articulation.

Certainly petroglyphs change according to the changing relationships of the worlds they are a part of. It is, however, important to recognize that the petroglyphs can be something more than silent representations reflecting social and natural events. It may be more useful to employ perspectivist thinking, exploring ontologically different ways of perceiving the material world (Alberti & Bray 2009). For instance, if we leave aside the asymmetrical ontology in which the human and material are separated, we may consider the prospect by which certain materialities (objects, animals, images, etc.) may be “animated” and charged with certain powers (Viveiros de Castro 2004; Ingold 2006; Hill 2011). Instead of only representing such entities, the petroglyphs may be considered ontologically “real” in a similar sense as any living entity. For example, the difference between painting or engraving an image in stone and the tedious process of pecking a petroglyph have different properties that may or may not be intentional. Whereas a rock painting may be done with a mixture of animal or human substances, the grooves of the petroglyph offer a void to be filled. It is known, for example, that in the past cup marks were greased or provided space for coins and other valuables (Goldhahn 2008b, 129). Following a similar logic, an anthropomorph or a zoomorph may be fed (or inseminated), and a boat image anointed, by filling the grooves with appropriate substances. The carefully sculptured figures, often with great emphasis on detail, make evident that the image is a critical component of the practice. However, as previously argued, petroglyphs are by definition constituted by a void, being hammered out of the rock. We may thus consider that the practice takes something away from the rock as much as it carves something on it. We

have no proper means to investigate what actually happened with the dust and sand pecked from the rock, but this might have been important material, charged with powers used to create relations between different places and individuals or with the supernatural.

It is generally recognized that the practice of making petroglyphs has probably many reasons and encompasses many meanings (e.g., Goldhahn 2008b, 71). It would thus be pointless to emphasize one aspect of the practice as valid across an entire region or throughout the Bronze Age. In order to continue to discuss the tacit aspects of the petroglyphs, it is necessary to move away from generalizations and relate to a specific body of material. In particular, I wish to discuss a cluster of petroglyphs outside the modern city of Enköping, about 100 kilometers northwest of the Swedish capital Stockholm (see Figure 15.1). At the parish of Boglösa there is an interesting cluster of petroglyphs, mainly from the

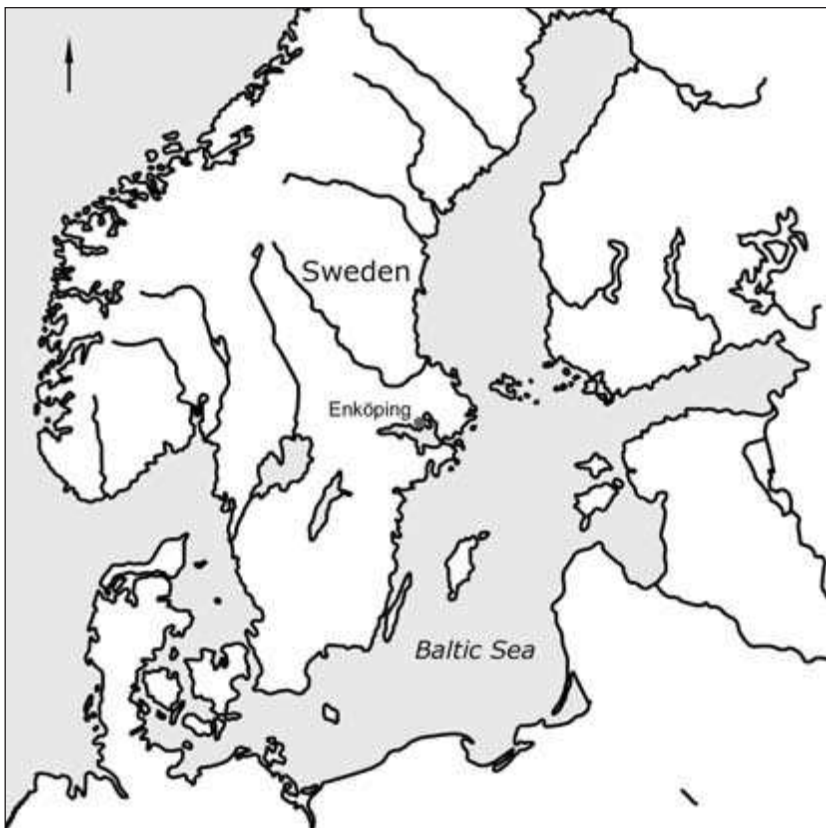


Figure 15.1 Map of southern Scandinavia with the location of the Enköping area



Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (Kjellén & Hyenstrand 1977; Coles 2000; Ling 2012).

## **A BAY OF IMAGES: THE PETROGLYPHS AT BOGLÖSA, UPPLAND**

The county of Uppland comprises one of the densest concentrations of petroglyphs in southern Sweden. Hitherto 7721 boats, 309 “foot soles,” 190 anthropomorphs, 185 zoomorphs, 128 circle features, and 612 other/undeterminable motifs, along with over 19000 cup marks, have been registered in this area alone (Goldhahn et al. 2010, 7). The area around Enköping encompasses a majority of the figurative petroglyphs, which cluster on the eastern mainland side of what during the Early Bronze Age (c. 1700–1100 BC) was a shallow cove. Why this particular place became filled with images in stone is by no means apparent. There are no particular settlement structures, burials, or other cultural remains that suggest that this place was much different from any other along the east coast. Some have suggested that it may have been an aggregation site where different maritime groups met and interacted and manifested their relations by making images in the bedrock (Wessman 2010; Ling 2012; see also Fahlander 2012a).

However, instead of viewing the appearance of petroglyphs as merely a result of social circumstances, it is also important to emphasize the different ways in which these images may have been integral parts of such a social process. For instance, what happened in this particular corner of the world when the rocks at the water’s edge began to be filled with images? How did it begin, and what were the consequences of such a development? Is it meaningful to equate the sheer number of images with a similar number of people? Can we even suggest that the abundance of petroglyphs is relative to the importance of the site? Or is it perhaps something analogous to modern day graffiti, something forbidden that is performed secretly at non-places and hidden areas?

For the Kilmartin region of Scotland, Andrew Jones has suggested that the making of petroglyphs draws attention to places and also relates different places to each other, creating relational links by means of imagery: “The production of images is a form of poesis, a way of weaving a sense of belonging and place, just as images are visually woven into the rock surface. More than this, it is a way of objectifying or visualizing the relationship between people and place” (Jones 2006, 222). In order to pursue such facets of the practice we need to consider in greater detail the particular circumstances in which the images were made.

Unfortunately, the shore displacement calculations in the area are not very precise because they are either not local or not detailed



enough. The most recent one for southwest Uppland by Pliikk (2010) ends at 1400 BC, and we can only roughly estimate the water level for the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age to c. 20–25 meters above the current sea level. The shore displacement rate is important because it suggests that the first petroglyphs were likely to be pecked very close to the water's edge. This is imperative for our understanding of the practice and of the role the images may have played. The green dots on Figure 15.2 mark sites with figurative petroglyphs along a shoreline c. 20 meters above the present-day level. The actual water level during the Early Bronze Age may have been a few meters higher. It is clearly evident that the petroglyphs tend to cluster at the water's edge at small creeks and coves and within the shallow bay. When studying the micro-topography of the sites it is also obvious that the majority of images face the water world, and when placed on islets they only rarely face the mainland. These circumstances imply that they were either made to be seen while approaching by boat or that they were directed to the seascape itself.

The audible aspects may have been of importance here. From ethnographic accounts we know that the sound of making images normally does not go unnoticed by people in the vicinity (Whitley 2011, 156–57).

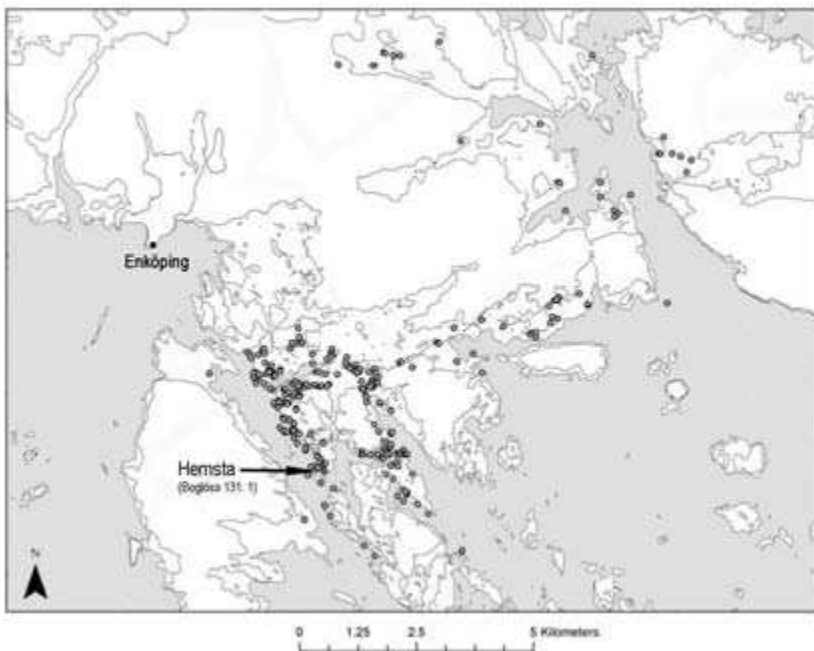


Figure 15.2 Boglösa Bay of Images (modified after Wessman 2011)

Pecking can often be heard from far away, which makes the practice noticeable. Patrik Nordström suggests that the sound of pecking petroglyphs was an important aspect that connected the imagery to the place and echoed relations to previous generations. The association with sound, he continues, implies that the sight of the images could have evoked audible memories, making the images more alive than simple silent representations (Nordström 1999, 134). Since the petroglyphs were made at the water's edge, the sound was likely to be heard over greater distances over the water than over the land. This may be an important hint of the image-making process and support the idea that the images were directed toward the seascape. However, in this particular case the bay may actually have been chosen to avoid the sound from being heard, since the large island to the west must have dampened the noise. These circumstances hint that the bay may have been chosen because of its secluded properties, suggesting that the images should not be heard nor seen.

Following the logic of these considerations, the production of petroglyphs by the water's edge can thus be seen either as a way of relating the local inhabitants with the wider world (real and/or imagined) or as a way for maritime groups to relate to the unknown worlds on the mainland (real and/or imagined). To complicate issues further, the petroglyphs might have been produced by both "locals" and "visitors." The manner in which certain motifs of different style and date relate to each other indicates that they can be interpreted as a case of an iconoclastic clash (an iconoclasm) between different groups. Elsewhere I have suggested that the typical southern tradition of petroglyphing emerged in a hybrid flux between different ways of life during the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (Fahlander 2012a; see Sognnes 2001, 131). From such a perspective it is easy to picture different groups, with both maritime and terrestrial lifestyles, moving about in the area and making images in stone to create and negotiate their relations with the different niches of the region. Some of the images may thus articulate a relation to the land world and others relate to the water world. The Boglösa "bay of images" becomes a material articulation of hybridity (Fahlander 2007, 2012b).

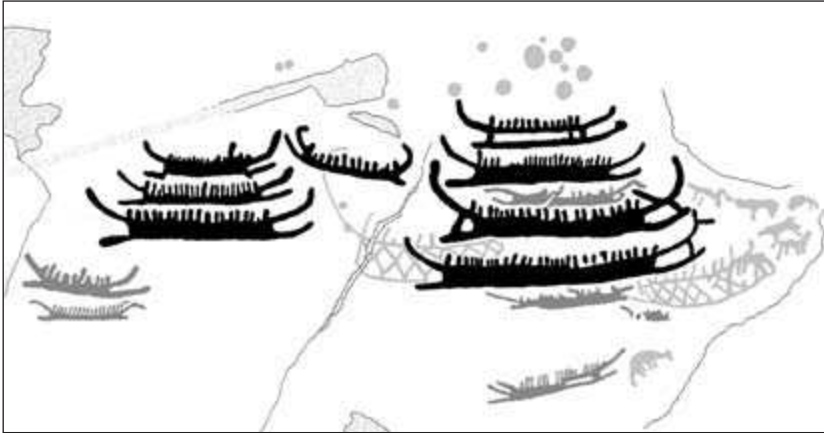
The idea that the Boglösa area may have been a kind of middle ground of hybrid relations may be substantiated by focusing in greater detail on how subsequent images relate to each other and to the properties of the bedrock. At the beginning of the Early Bronze Age, the Hemsta outcrop was a small islet at the southern entrance to the Boglösa bay. The altitude above sea level suggests that this outcrop was submerged until about 2500 BC, when it gradually became visible above the surface (see Figure 15.3).



**Figure 15.3** A tentative illustration of how the Hemsta outcrop may have looked at the beginning of the second millennium BC. View from the mainland toward the island in the west.

A broad range of different motifs are present at the site, including anthropomorphs, zoomorphs, and geometric figures, but the vast majority of the images consist of various boat-like figures. What makes this small outcrop particularly interesting is that it has recently been subject to detailed documentation that not only recorded the varying depth of the images but also the natural cracks, fissures, and ores in the bedrock. This has made it feasible to establish a horizontal stratigraphy of a sequence of phases (Fahlander 2012a). Figure 15.4 illustrates the main phases. The earliest motifs are two shallowly pecked boats with hatched hulls and a group of animals, one of which is merged with one of the boats (light gray). The second phase consists of two columns of distinctly cut stacked boats (black); these superimpose the hatched boats. The third phase (gray) consists of a number of smaller boat images that also superimpose the earliest motifs but are adjusted to fit the gaps between the stacked boats.

In more detail, the first phase (light gray) consists of two boat figures and a number of zoomorphs and is distinguished by the following aspects: the cut is thin and shallow, the type and design of the boats are rare (only found at a few other sites), the two boats and the animals vary in alignment, and one boat extends over a natural crack in the bedrock. An interesting aspect of this is that one of the animals is incorporated



**Figure 15.4** Part of the Hemsta outcrop (RAÄ Boglösa 131) and the sequence of phases illustrated in shades of gray. Image retouched based on a documentation made by Broström (2011).

into one of the boats, a phenomenon commonly found in the northern Neolithic tradition (e.g., Sjöstrand 2011, 123). The motifs of the second phase (black), by contrast, are distinctly and deeply cut, they have a similar design with hammered-out hulls, they share an alignment, and are stacked on top of each other. They do not avoid interfering with the previously cut boats but do not extend over the natural cracks of the bedrock. It is interesting how they relate in size to each other. Although they differ slightly in length, their size is maximized in relation to the available space between the cracks in the bedrock. The third phase is characterized by a number of boats of smaller size and slightly different style. These figures too are adjusted to the natural cracks in the bedrock, and they superimpose the images of the first phase. They do, however, avoid the previously carved images of the second phase.

The rather abrupt change from the first two delicate pecked boats found on a recently <sup>emerged</sup> ~~submerged~~ rocky island in the Enköpings archipelago to the columns of distinctly cut boat motifs filling the available surface may constitute a classic example of an iconoclasm (Latour 2002). The two columns of large boats dominate the space, not only by size and depth, but also by their consistent alignment: in a sense they “kill” the previous images. The subsequent third phase of smaller boats seemingly adjusted to the large ones may represent a case of relating to something of the past, perhaps in a similar way that secondary burials sometimes relate to a previous burial mound. This superimposition also indicates the importance of a particular space, in this case the uppermost area of

the impediment, since there were a lot of suitable areas to make new petroglyphs just meters away.

The displacements in size, depth, alignment, and superimposition suggest that the panel is not likely to be a planned composition. The sequence rather shows a cumulative development between phases, again not too different from the development of burial grounds in which new burials need to relate to previous ones (see Moberg 1965). Two of the boat figures illustrate the careful adjustment of subsequent images. One is a boat of the third phase that has been crammed to fit in between two larger boat images of the previous phase. The prows of the boat have been bent to fit the available space. It is interesting that the extended size of the prow and keel lines were regarded as so important that they were not simply reduced in size but were rather bent in an unusual manner. The other example is the topmost boat on the left column of boat images (light blue). Here the diagonal crack in the bedrock has prevented it from being placed on top of the other three boats, as in the right column. Instead, the boat has been placed at an angle at the side of the left column. These priorities have resulted in a figure that has a more curved shape and thus an apparently different style. It may be noted that this phenomenon is not unique to this particular rock. Another example of this type of adjustments to the column format is also found on another panel (RAÄ Boglösa 73:1)<sup>1</sup> a few kilometers north of Hemsta. Again this panel consists of two columns of boat images fitted between natural cracks of the rock, and the stacking of images is disrupted. In this case an anthropomorph figure is placed above the two lowermost boats and thus forces the third to be placed at an angle at the side of the left column.

The apparent importance of the natural cracks in the bedrock is interesting in several ways. The relations between different images and the rock seem to be randomly dispersed. They obviously relate to each other as well as to the cracks and fissures of the bedrock. The apparent importance of the Hemsta panel discussed here may thus not be necessarily due to its location at the entrance of the bay, nor to its being the highest space on the outcrop, but to the way the bedrock offers a suitable space between the cracks. This is informative, since it reveals aspects of the boat motif that were important to those who made the images.

## **MATERIAL RELATION-SHIPS (OR, WHAT THIS “BOAT” MEANS)**

It is interesting to note the small but significant displacements in the way in which new motifs have been added to the Hemsta outcrop. Seen from an iconological perspective, most images on this particular panel are of

roughly the same style and are dated to the first period of the Bronze Age—except the images of the first phase, which show some differences in style and are of Neolithic date (Ling 2012, 52). Of all the figurative petroglyphs in Uppland, the boat motif is by far the most common. Of 472 figurative panels, 408 contain one or more boats (ibid., 4). I have used the descriptive term “boat” in this text for convenience, but without subscribing to any *a priori* ideas of what they may or may not represent. Indeed, what these iconic figures really represent, symbolize, or mean is far from evident. The close spatial relation to the water’s edge is one indication of a maritime interpretation, and there are also a few petroglyphs that portray in greater detail a crew of paddlers (e.g., Coles 1995, 27). One obvious examples of this, the huge Brandskog boat, is also found in the Boglösa area (see Figure 15.5). However, images always carry a potential to be something other than what they seem to depict (Ginzburg 2002, 63ff; Wittgenstein 2009). There are few means for us to understand if the petroglyphs are pictures, pictograms, or ideograms (e.g., Mitchell 1987, 27).

Since we do not know the ontological status of the petroglyphs, it is problematic to assume that a boat image made in stone is a boat (whether it is supposed to represent a real vessel of a mythological one).



**Figure 15.5** The big Brandskog boat (RAÄ Boglösa 109), c. 4.2 meters long. The date is uncertain but is stylistically attributed to the Late Bronze Age. Photo by Einar Kjellén (Enköpings Museum, ID:109M CBekBoglosaby).

The boat figure is interesting for other reasons than its representational features of image content. An important aspect of the boat motif lies in its overall consistency. It is striking how uniform the basic boat motif is over great distances and over long periods of time (see Ljunge, *in press*). Although they come in many different shapes and forms, these boats are generally recognizable to us as similar. But was it evident to the circumpolar hunter-gatherers that their boats were the same as those of the Bronze Age communities? If these images represent actual sea vessels, their importance must have been quite diverse according to different ways of life.

I do not question the boat interpretation nor that these figures mean something, or perhaps even illustrate and represent something. However, to treat the petroglyphs from a representational perspective as “objects of recognition” masks and renders invisible other aspects of the motif. Whether one wishes to understand these images as depictions of real vehicles indicating primarily maritime activity (Ling 2008), as ideal vessels transporting the dead to the other side (Ekholm 1916), as vessels transporting the sun (Kaul 1998), or as representing “boat-loads of people” (Tilley 2004, 195), such categorical way of thinking is problematic.

An alternative way of looking at this motif is as something similar to an iconic key symbol (Ortner 1973). As such it need not have a particular essence but can be employed as a vehicle for the mind for a variety of purposes (see Sjöstrand 2011, 160). From such a perspective, the apparent importance of certain details (e.g., the bent prows) and the overall great variability of the boat motif make better sense (e.g., figures mixed with both contour and hammered-out hulls, boats with or without “crew strokes,” etc.). The boat figure may thus have been a way of articulating a great numbers of things. This allows for quite a lot of creativity in varying and combining different elements and figures with each other and the rock. The variability is thus also part of “the message.”

The category of “boats” and the conclusions drawn from such an interpretation not only illustrate the difficulties with viewing the imagery as objects of recognition; it also underlines the perils of being trapped by the aesthetic appearance of the imagery and its presumed social context. For example, it is indicative how the visual worlds of the Bronze Age differ between the Irish/British contexts and those of southern Scandinavia. In studies of the former, the period is discussed in almost mundane terms, whereas research on the south Scandinavian petroglyphs focuses much more on grand narratives of cosmology or ideology. As Jones (2006, 214) has indicated, this might partly be due to the fact that Irish/British rock art consists of abstract motifs, whereas the southern Scandinavian



art is figurative and “recognizable.” The binary division of Scandinavian rock art in a northern and a southern tradition comprises an analogous case. It is not surprising that the northern tradition is largely argued to be a shamanic articulation, whereas the southern tradition is charged with a much more complex cosmology with ideological underpinnings (e.g., Malmer 1981; Kaul 1998). For instance, when Tilley writes about making petroglyphs of swords, lures, and other metal objects as “bronzing the rock” (2008, 253), a parallel way or reasoning would be to see petroglyphs in the northern tradition as “elking the rock.” Clearly our preconceived understandings of the society in question direct our interpretations of the practice and the meaning of rock art.

However, contrasting interpretations across contexts can also be illustrative when it comes to different uses of similar motifs or techniques, relations, and combinations—for instance, the way boat motifs are made and arranged in the northern and southern tradition, respectively. What does it mean that the northern tradition is dominated by elk figures and the southern tradition by boat figures? Indeed, there seems to be a much more integrated relation between those two types of figures. In the northern tradition of circumpolar hunters, petroglyphs of four-legged zoomorphs (“elks”) and boats are frequently mixed and combined in various ways. Some boat images have what looks like animal heads on the prow. A number of figures have also been transformed from boats to elks and vice versa by later manipulations and additions (e.g., Bolin 2000, 167–69; Sjöstrand 2011, 123). Examples of similar hybrids are, as mentioned, found at the Hemsta outcrop (Boglösa 131). The large Brandskog boat has unmistakable animal heads on its prows, and there are other examples of more stylized “elk-boats” in the area as well (e.g., Boglösa 73 and 123).

It is also intriguing that a relation (elk-boat) that apparently emerged within a mobile hunting and gathering life style has survived in the more sedentary, farming lifestyle of the Bronze Age. It is difficult to understand which unknown “dark matters” lie in this particular hyphen, but the elk-boat motif illustrates the problems with categorical thinking and typological approaches to imagery. Another transformation common to the two seemingly different traditions of making petroglyphs is the practice of exaggerating and prolonging certain elements of the figure. In the northern tradition it can be the necks of bird figures, whereas in the southern tradition it is human extremities and artifact depictions that are exaggerated (Fahlander 2012b, 2013).

The use of similar, though not identical, motifs in both traditions is interesting since it may provide a link between different ways of life as well as between the past and the present. It is probably no coincidence that the southern tradition emerged during the Early Bronze Age. It is an

old tradition that was probably made deliberately in a different style to mark a break, a distinction. This is illustrated by the “killing” of the first pair of boats at Hemsta by the new boat figures, distinctly cut in a new style. Thus, the use of an archaic tradition signals a relation to the old ways at the same time as it emphasizes a break with them.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have discussed the prospects of a relational and non-representative analysis of south Scandinavian petroglyphs as an alternative to traditional contextual and stylistic approaches to image analysis. This perspective is not necessarily better and does not entirely replace contextual and interpretative approaches, but it has the potential to emphasize the relational aspects of images, practices, and materialities that tend to be made invisible in categorical and contextual approaches. By analyzing petroglyphs as material articulations rather than representations, it is possible to see them as part of social structuration rather than a simple reflection of it. The focus is placed here on the possible magical aspects of the practice of making images in stone and of their unintended and unforeseen effects.

My analysis of the Hemsta outcrop emphasized the materiality of the medium, the rock. The resilient nature of the bedrock offers the images almost eternal life and binds them to a certain place. Such an impression is also supported by the Hemsta panel, which shows how boat images are adjusted to the natural cracks and fissures in the rock in order to be intact. The rock also provides a resistance and demands an effort to make images, which also places emphasis on aspects such as size and depth, level of detail, and aesthetic appearance. In particular the common boat figure, as an iconic key symbol, is nested in various sets of relationships. The making of petroglyphs in south Scandinavia during the Early Bronze Age was an active component in a series of material “meshworks” connecting sea and land, human and material, farming and hunting, past and present, as well as different places.

## NOTE

1. RAÄ number according to the ancient monuments registry (Fornminnesregistret), based on parishes and current number within the parish.

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**Joshua Pollard**



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